



Chair's message

TEACH STAYS DEDICATED TO OUR MISSION DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

By Shari Zamorra

It is a pleasure to greet you in this season of gratitude. As the Advent season approaches and our daylight lessens, we are reminded of the valuable virtues of hope and patience, sorely needed while our world still seems upside down.

When so many things are uncertain, TEACH stays true to our mission. Your generous response to our Matching Funds Appeal buoyed our confidence.

In Guatemala, our students continue to study despite challenging conditions, including Covid-19 deaths of some parents in one area. Fortunately, at that site, TEACH supports a psychologist to help. While the Covid-19 case numbers, are not large the lengthy, widespread community closures pose great hardships for families. Then Hurricane Eta caused severe flooding.

Like all of us, our partners have adapted willingly. Just as in the United States, teachers go out of their way to bring lessons to students. The school year was

extended by five weeks, into early December, to make up for missed weeks in the spring. Many students at the primary, middle and high school levels are finishing up terms and eager to continue their education. A young woman at Sacred Heart Boarding tells us "I have grown up and learned many good things here. This

We miss you! Donors, sponsors and friends, please let us know if you'd like to join the TEACH Board on a "Zoom" catch-up call from 6:30-7 p.m. on Dec. 8, Jan. 12, Feb. 9, March 9, April 13, or May 11. Just send an email to us at Board@teacham.org and we'll send you the link.



Students at Semuy Middle School are constant and clever with their gratitude for TEACH support.

has been my home."

Here at TEACH we take pride in our ability to be flexible and nimble enough to adapt. We connect with our partners in new, safe ways. Zoom works for Guatemala also! Plan to join us in our Open Forum sessions so we can hear from you. New ideas and energy are always welcome, especially as we plan for the future! Mission Appeal Plans continue and are hoped for in many dioceses - Erie, Penn.; Miami Fla.; Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minn.; Hartford, Conn.; and Fall River, Mass. are possible. We may come to your area!

Our respect and concern for you, our supporters, is paramount. We send prayers for all as you celebrate the holidays in new ways, and for the safety of all your loved ones.

In February or March 2021, travelers are needed for our annual Guatemalan adventure. Contact me at shari.zamorra@gmail.com.

# COPING WITH COVID-19 IN GUATEMALA PRESENTS NEW CHALLENGES

*By Fred Walker*

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected public health, employment, education and the economy in Guatemala. There have been close to 98,000 coronavirus cases, and 3,400 deaths in Guatemala, as of Oct. 11, 2020.



*A teacher and student work together at Creek de Cuatro Cayos.*

In March 2020 students were sent home, and normal, in-class education was halted due to the spreading pandemic. The spread of the coronavirus has hit the population surrounding one of our sponsored schools near Antigua particularly hard. Two parents have died and some 37 percent of the population has, or has had, the virus. TEACH has been

providing funding for a school child psychologist at the kindergarten to high school Semilla de Esperanza y Amor (Seeds of Hope and Love). The psychologist has spent time with the families that have lost lives due to the Covid-19 virus.

Meanwhile, the middle school in Semuy has not had any cases, according to our last report from the school principal. But they fear that if people do not adhere to wearing face masks and social distancing that the coronavirus will eventually strike them as well.

Needless to say, distance-learning for the students of our schools and facilities has been particularly challenging. Students formerly residing in our sponsored boarding facilities were all required to return to their homes to avoid sanctions imposed by the Guatemalan government, and all students are supposed to be participating in virtual learning. Eleven of the 17 boarding school girls at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Educational Center, in Quirigua, were able to return from their home villages in September and successfully completed the academic school year. Two other young women were unable to return because their parents feared the coronavirus. The teachers at Sacred Heart sent them the school materials to work on. The girls and their teachers coordinated via WhatsApp and were able to take their final exams.

Students are receiving study guides that were implemented by the Ministry of Education. According

to Ernesto, the principal of the middle school in Semuy, the teaching materials are available on the Ministry of Education platform that is distributed to students. Unfortunately, few of his students, as well as others in remote areas, have access to the internet or even electricity. This makes it extremely challenging, but they are all coping as best they can.

Parents of the distance-learning students are encouraged to help their children with their studies. But in many cases the parents have had less education than their children, so help is problematic.

In most cases, the teachers prepare teaching guides that are distributed to the students. The students in Semuy, for example, appear in person to receive their guides. They are all required to wear masks when picking up their study requirements. Students who have questions visit their teachers in person because of the lack of telephone signal coverage. In other locales, the teachers deliver the study guides and materials to the students.



*A Lagunita student gets help from her mother with school work.*

We recently learned that that the Ministry of Education has extended the school year by five weeks, to early December, to give students extra time to complete annual educational requirements, as needed.

While the pandemic has had a severe impact on the children's education, the desire of the teachers, parents, and students to allow these children to receive an education plus innovative measures taken by the teachers, village committees, and administrators give hope that they will endure and continue on their educational path.

*Fred Walker is Treasurer for TEACH.*

## OUR MISSION

The mission of TEACH is to actively respond to the schooling needs of underserved children, in Maya communities in Guatemala.



*St. Ambrose Catholic School students, in Annandale, Va. display letters and pictures received from Semuy.*



*Semuy Basico Middle School students hold up letters from their St. Ambrose Catholic School pen pals in Virginia.*

## U.S. PEN PALS PRACTICE NEW SPANISH SKILLS WITH MAYA STUDENTS

*By Donald Gantz*

St. Ambrose Catholic School in Annandale, Va., offers Spanish language courses to 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. For several years, students in these courses have been pen pals with Spanish-language students in Guatemala. The St. Ambrose students were surprised to learn that their Guatemalan pen pals, like themselves, take Spanish as a second language.

The Guatemalan pen pals are indigenous Maya from mountainous eastern Guatemala who have Q'eqchi' as their primary language. The Spanish-language pen pals

from both countries are dealing with the same grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and usage issues as they learn Spanish as a new language. At each level, 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades, students have pen pals with similar language skills. The letters from the Guatemalan students are beautifully composed and traditionally open with a blessing and an invocation for God's help with lessons and work.

St. Ambrose students say they are impressed by the style and careful composition of the pen pal letters from their counterparts. They have learned the value of education, particularly in the Spanish language, to the Maya children. Without education and literacy in Spanish, the children will be marginalized in Guatemala where the national language is Spanish. Communication with the Maya children through letters and accompanying artwork has opened up a cultural window into Maya life for the St. Ambrose students. They hope that their own letters reciprocate that experience for their pen pals in Guatemala.

The pen pal program was initiated by St. Ambrose Spanish teacher Patty Cummins in partnership with TEACH, to support education opportunities for Maya children in a way that both respects their cultural heritage and empowers their communities toward greater social and economic self-sufficiency. The pen pal letter exchanges are carried out during the TEACH administrative site visits to Guatemala in February each year, and the TEACH-sponsored Teacher Workshop in Guatemala each July.

Pictures and videos from these visits allow the St. Ambrose students to see their pen pals at home and to see the appreciation they show for the outreach they are receiving. The TEACH-enabled relationship between student pen pals has brought a missionary experience to the St. Ambrose students. The educational and cultural exchange has allowed students to participate in an effective volunteer outreach that reinforces their Catholic missionary heritage.

*See PEN PALS, Page 4*



Editor: Toni Maltagliati

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## THANK YOU, GRACIAS, BANTIOX

The work of TEACH would not be possible without continuous support from others. We are fortunate to have the assistance of those who share their time, talents and treasures on a regular basis. THANK YOU to all whom we compassionately call the "TEACH Family." (Confused by our headline? "Bantiox" means "thank you" in Q'eqchi'.)

As our fund-raising efforts were curtailed by the virus, our supporters responded to our "double donations" appeal announced in our last newsletter. The response was an overwhelming success. Along with the generous match of \$10,000 we raised a total of **\$21,015**. These funds have enabled us to continue to support our efforts in Guatemala without interruption.

Also due to the virus, we were unable to complete our scheduled Mission Appeals visits to various diocese and

churches through the country. That didn't stop the diocese of Hartford, Conn., from organizing a collection for TEACH among their parishes. The collection and contribution from the diocese resulted in an \$8,000 donation to TEACH. For both of these efforts, we are extremely grateful.

To assist in preparing and distributing the newsletter we have the fortunate talents of our editor Toni Maltagliati. She manages to assemble our news and ideas and present them in a readable and informative fashion. Her patience, endurance and creativity are well appreciated by board members and the TEACH Family.

Once printed, the newsletters are prepared for distribution by volunteer Eileen Hammonds and her granddaughters Keri and Rebecca Mills.

## PEN PALS

*Continued from preceding page*

Their pen pal program has been an important communication link between cultures that reinforces a bond of respect between partners. The St. Ambrose students have learned how TEACH is sustained by a core group of dedicated Board members, sponsors and donors. A few tools, such as laptop computers, are brought down on TEACH's annual visit to project sites. However, the

bulk of TEACH support is financial, to initiate and sustain educational opportunities. Students have learned that the burden for the TEACH volunteers is continuous fundraising. Indeed, one of the St. Ambrose students' tangible responses has been to dedicate their "dress down day" donations to support TEACH work in Guatemala.

The St. Ambrose pen pal program has provided this new window to volunteering and outreach.

*Donald Gantz is a Board member for TEACH.*

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## Yes, I would like to be a TEACH sponsor

*Please ask a friend to be a sponsor of TEACH. \$30 a month (\$360 a year) will keep a child in school.*

*I'll sponsor:*

Boy  Girl in primary grades

Boy  Girl in middle school

*Make all checks payable to **TEACH***

*Mail to: Toward Educating America's Children*

*P.O. Box 188*

*Burke, VA 22009*

*I have enclosed a check in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_*

*I cannot be a sponsor now, but I am enclosing a donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_*

*Name \_\_\_\_\_*

*Address \_\_\_\_\_*

*City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_*

*Phone (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (Other) \_\_\_\_\_*

*E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_*

**TEACH** will never share your name or personal information with other organizations.

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